

Monica Tap's Shifting Practice of Perception  
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To navigate an ever-changing world, human animals sometimes ignore certain perceptual stimulations. Light; shade; breezes; scents; reflections; refractions; colours and contrasts shift in their dynamics as clouds block the sun; fires burn; waters flow; soils absorb nutrients; seeds sprout — even rocks slowly eroding — nothing is ever truly static and no passing moment is the same as any other point in time. This would all be overwhelming if not for our ability to tune out sensory input. People focus their attention purposefully to get things done. But sometimes, it's good to pause, open up to all the senses, and apprehend what it feels like to be alive.

Monica Tap's paintings gently invite viewers into a space of heightened awareness. These are landscapes, clearly, but without the traditional forms of taming, framing and singular address that the genre of landscape painting usually invokes. While renaissance linear perspective posits a specifically located, singular observer, Tap's paintings call for multiple and shifting points of view. In the painting, *Edges Slide Together*, for example, an illusion of depth is confounded by the abutting and layering of different, sharp-edged forms. In *Rebound*, a painting inspired by the regeneration of a burnt forest, vertical fractures bounce the gaze between contrasting frames of reference. In this respect, Tap's paintings are more Eastern than Western, eschewing Western power dynamics between humans (the artist/viewer) and nature (the scene). Instead, they address the viewer as an unfixed entity, as much a part of nature's flow as a rock, plant, or tree.

Tap's influences include painters who have a mystical approach to nature and those who express the natural world's complexity in ways that are not photographic. In the studio, she often brings diverse painters together through collages, which become loose starting points, or seeds, for her paintings. Tap told me that she sometimes thinks of her works as painting parties that invite in artists from diverse places and periods to bring their voices and perceptions into conversation with what she sees. "I want to evoke the liveliness and multiplicity of the experience of being immersed in nature," says Tap, "fully aware of the art filters that shape my vision but giving none of them exclusive power."

Thus, a variety of painting styles co-exist within Tap's dynamic canvases; sometimes extravagant, sometimes restrained, sometimes finely detailed and sometimes boldly abstract. Throughout her career, Tap has consistently set up systems that allow her the freedom to play, experiment and, as she describes it, "to let the paint tell the story." The result is a combination of controlled precision and lush painterly gestures; a dynamic tension that pervades all her works.

Tap's use of collage started with an earlier series, inspired by a visit to a rhododendron garden in Bremen. As Tap described her experience, it was an evening in May, and the whole park glowed with soft light "like a 3D painting." Tap tried painting directly from the photographs she took in the park but wasn't happy with the results. When she started using collage, she found that the paintings became "oddly more realistic."

Cameras can be so frustrating. They freeze and flatten, translating rich, shifting perceptions into fixed, static scenes. In this age of social media, we swim in a sea of photographic verification and ownership: “I was there,” “I saw that,” and, by inference, “This is mine.” Tap’s paintings refuse such commodification. In her words, “Perception is episodic, it shifts as we try to grab it. I am mindful that there are many registers of time happening simultaneously.” Rocks, rivers and plants all move through different timespans, even as they sometimes come in contact with one another.

At first glance, from a distance, the painting *On a Rock by a Dark Lake* might appear like a traditional landscape. But perspectival illusion is confounded by the horizontal composition. There are three distinct zones. The top half is vibrant, with contrasting fragments in bright reds, yellows and greens. Plant life burgeons forth— fast, organic and exuberant. The middle is richly dark in deep blues and greys, a liminal watery zone with mysterious depths. A strip of vibrant green sits atop this murky space, interrupting the depth with a hard-edged, flat intrusion that harkens directly to the process of collage. Two large, rock-like shapes inhabit the bottom of the canvas — slow, stoic, and yet also alive — asking viewers to pause and contemplate the very long-term processes of geologic time.

For me, this painting resonates in the current age of climate change. It speaks of the precarious and precious combination of forces that make up life on planet Earth. I asked Tap about my interpretation, and she said she has been considering how landscape is reconfigured by hurricanes, tornados and other major storms. This, she said, got her “thinking about landscape painting 'coming apart at the seams', which seems about right, given the dual devastations of colonialism and climate change.”

It is a humble aspiration to locate oneself as just one perceiving entity among many, and an ambitious undertaking to convey that sensory abundance through such diverse painterly languages. “Different voices come together yet maintain their identities,” Tap told me. “That coherence gives me a kind of hope.”